

**UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT  
PROGRAMME**



**PROGRAMME DES NATIONS UNIES  
POUR L'ENVIRONNEMENT**

**Report by the Agreement on the Conservation of Small Cetaceans of the Baltic and North Seas (UNEP/ASCOBANS)  
to the 31th Meeting of the Standing Committee to the Convention on Migratory Species,  
Bonn, Germany, 28-29 September 2006**

In the last year of the current triennium, UNEP/ASCOBANS has continued to successfully implement the work plan adopted by MOP 4 (Esbjerg, Denmark, August 2004) while at the same time laying the groundwork for the new triennium.

Further progress was made in elaborating a conservation plan for harbour porpoises in the North Sea. Following a meeting of the drafting group established by the 12<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Advisory Committee (Brest, France, April 2005) in Hamburg, Germany in February of this year, a revised version was presented to the 13<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Advisory Committee (Tampere, Finland, 25-27 April 2006). The final draft will be submitted to the 5<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Parties (to be held in Egmond aan Zee, Netherlands, in September 2006).

Following its very successful first meeting in Bonn, Germany, in March 2005, the ASCOBANS Jastarnia Group met for the second time in Stralsund, Germany in February 2006. The meeting was organized by the UNEP/ASCOBANS Secretariat and hosted by the German Oceanographic Museum. The Jastarnia Group was established to carry forward the Agreement's Recovery Plan for Baltic Harbour Porpoises (Jastarnia Plan). At its second meeting, the Group, chaired by Dr. Stefan Bräger, once again made numerous recommendations for the future. Most of these recommendations were endorsed by the 13<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Advisory Committee. The next meeting of the Group is scheduled to take place in Denmark in spring 2007.

The 13<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Advisory Committee was held in Tampere, Finland from 25 – 27 April 2006. Among the topics the Committee dealt with were the implementation of the Jastarnia Plan, the North Sea Conservation Plan, preliminary results of SCANS-II and the implications of the extension of the Agreement area. The main emphasis of the meeting was on preparing the upcoming MOP. The Committee discussed numerous draft resolutions and various issues related to the current and future scope of the Agreement.

While bycatch remains at the center of attention for ASCOBANS, the Agreement also continues to address other threats facing cetaceans in the Agreement Area, including acoustic disturbance and marine pollution. In close cooperation with other international organizations, ASCOBANS is working to reduce the level of hazardous substances in the marine environment. The Agreement Secretariat continues to monitor information on high-speed ferries, which may have adverse effects on whales and dolphins. Annual compilations of information submitted by ASCOBANS Parties concerning high-speed ferries are produced by the Secretariat.

As always, UNEP/ASCOBANS makes its contribution to much needed research on cetaceans in the Agreement area. A number of research activities are being undertaken within the framework of, in cooperation with or with the support of ASCOBANS. Thus several workshops will be organized by or in cooperation with ASCOBANS in the coming months. These workshops will cover topics such as guidelines for the identification of sites of importance for small cetaceans, genetics of harbour porpoises in the ASCOBANS area or development of a European-wide bottlenose dolphin research project.

The Agreement also devotes considerable effort to outreach and educational work. To name but one example: ASCOBANS is one of the partners of the Year of the Dolphin campaign, launched jointly by CMS, its cetacean-related regional Agreements and the Wale and Dolphin Conservation Society.

The Agreement continues to build, maintain and enhance links with other relevant international organizations.

ASCOBANS is rapidly growing both in terms of the number of Parties and its geographical scope while at the same time stepping up its activities in its original agreement area. The current ASCOBANS agreement area stretches from the eastern reaches of the Baltic to the western end of the British Channel. The 4<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Parties (Esbjerg, Denmark, August 2003) adopted a resolution extending the Agreement area south-westwards to cover a portion of the eastern North Atlantic, making the Agreement area contiguous with that of ACCOBAMS. The extended agreement area comprises a total of sixteen range states, of which ten have acceded to ASCOBANS to date, the two most recent accessions having taken place in 2005 (France and Lithuania). Estonia is in the process of ratifying and is expected to join the Agreement in the second half of 2006 or in early 2007, whilst Spain has declared its strong interest in acceding upon entry into force of the extension of the agreement area.